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ABSTRACT

Support is growing for the expansion of field-based experiences in the preparation of teachers. Such expansion raises the question of the potential impact of large numbers of teachers-in-training on the monetary and human resources of teacher education programs and K-12 schools. Research was conducted to begin to answer this question in Minnesota. A questionnaire was sent to all elementary, middle level, and high school principals and to the highest ranking administrator in each of the teacher education programs in Minnesota. A total of 144 survey instruments were completed and returned (63 percent). Survey questions focused on: (1) how increased placements would affect teacher education programs and host schools; (2) how increased placements would affect relations between school districts and teacher education programs; and (3) responsibility for costs associated with increased placements. Results suggest that elementary level principals see potential usefulness for additional teachers-in-training; middle level and high school principals see value but have greater reservations. Chief administrators in teacher education programs indicate significant concern for expanded placement programs; deans and chairs think additional field placements will be a burden on human resources within their own programs and those of the host schools. (LL)

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Teacher Education Reform

and

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Perceptions from Minnesota's Schools and Colleges

by

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Introduction

It is clear from reading the research literature that more and more teacher educators are looking to increase the number of field experiences for their preservice education students. John Goodlad (1990), for example, in his book Teachers for Our Nation's Schools, offers this testimony:

> Programs for the education of educators must assure for each candidate the availability of a wide array of laboratory settings for observation, hands-on experiences, and exemplary schools for internships and residencies. (p. 295)

This idea is certainly not new. Gantt and Davey (1973) conducted an objective study in which students and cooperating teachers gave positive appraisals of increased field experiences in teacher education programs, and, according to Johnson (1973), maximizing field experience opportunities was also consistent with the trend for such increases at many institutions. Bultman and Dirkse (1977) reported, for example, that Hope College decided to maximize the field component of its teacher education program "due largely to the response of educators in the field, the urging of our own students, and the desire of a faculty to produce the best teachers possible." The value of increasing the number of field experiences has also been espoused by a number of other researchers such as Cooper and Sadker (1972), Harp (1974), and Ralph (1989).

The purpose of this research was to discover how two groups of Minnesota educators - school principals and deans/chairs of teacher education programs - reacted to the idea of increased field placements. Would more field placements enhance or strain school/college relationships? Would more field placements strain

college budgets or overburden classroom teachers? Should classroom teachers expect greater incentives in exchange for opening their classrooms to more prospective teachers, and if so, what forms should those incentives take and who should pay for them? It seemed timely and prudent to the authors of this essay to ask such questions before charging ahead with the implementation of increased field experiences. Before presenting the results of the survey and their implications, however, the rationale behind more preservice field experiences will be examined briefly.

Rationale

Reacting to criticism from virtually all quarters of the education field on grounds of "ivory towerism" and aloofness from the realities of public school teaching, field experiences have become a more integral part of teacher training programs. Traditional programs have adopted field experience as an opportunity to give meaning, and relevancy to the lectures, readings, discussions, and other more academic activities found in college classrooms. Field experience, then, is seen as an opportunity to bring theory and practice together, thus providing students with a higher degree of concern, commitment and motivation toward the content of the college course of which the field experience is a part.

Uhlenberg and Holt (1976) interviewed 138 elementary education majors at the University of Utah about their field experiences as part of their teacher education program. When these students were asked "What would best alleviate any fears and concerns you may have about teaching?" they were nearly unanimous in responding with phrases like "More experience." Furthermore, the researchers found that these students believed strongly that only through experience does one learn those

methods, techniques, and approaches that eventually help them develop as good teachers. From the students' point of view, neither the possession of personality characteristics for teaching nor job experience had anything to do with their university courses. If teacher training institutions opt to continue to operate in primarily an academic manner, according to Uhlenberg and Holt, they assume great risk, for dissatisfaction in several sectors of the country is growing, manifesting itself in "increased challenges on a number of fronts to the university's traditional control over undergraduate and graduate teacher education." (p.9)

Byrd and Garofalo (1982) provided a less alarming rationale for increasing field experiences for the preservice teacher (PST). According to these authors, the primary reason for increasing field experiences should be that such opportunities allow PST's to form more balanced and realistic conceptions of themselves as potential teachers of children. Byrd and Garofalo also contended that there are three other reasons why pre-student teaching field experiences are valuable and necessary:

> First, the student teaching experience alone is not sufficient because it provides neither enough time nor enough variety of experiences. Second, the student teaching experience will be much more efficient and valuable if the PST's enter it with prior field experiences which have allowed them to develop ideas, competencies, and confidence concerning teaching. Third, student teaching comes late, while the field experiences can and should occur throughout their training... allowing PST's to practice teaching while they are concurrently learning content, methods, and use of materials. This practice concretely reenforces learning in on-campus classes. (p. 46)

The literature is replete with studies and opinions which support increasing field experiences for students seeking a teaching certificate through a college's teacher education program. In theory, there seems to be little dispute over the efficacy of this

movement. However, how will increased placements of preservice teachers affect college and school budgets, teacher education faculty, school administrators, teachers, and students seeking licensure? Will it be problematic to translate theory into practice? Your author decided to ask these kinds of questions in an effort to ascertain how increased field placements would be perceived in Minnesota by school principals and the deans/chairs of college and university teacher education programs across the state.

Methods

Subjects

Educational administrators most directly responsible for educational programs affected by field-based teacher education in K-12 public schools and licensed teacher education programs in an upper midwestern state served as the target population in this study. Operationally this group was defined as building principals in public schools and the chief administrator for teacher education programs in the state's private and public colleges/universities. In order to identify administrators affected by field placements a cluster sampling method was employed. Groups of public school districts surrounding each of the 26 teacher education programs in the state were identified and included as data collection sites.

A questionnaire was sent to all elementary, middle level, and high school principals in districts surrounding each teacher education program. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to the highest ranking administrator in each of the teacher education programs in the state. Questionnaires were received from 86 of the 147 elementary level principals surveyed for a 59% response rate; 27 of the 57 middle level principals surveyed completed the questionnaire for a 47% response rate; 14 of

the 26 high school principals surveyed completed the questionnaire for a 54% response rate and 17 of the 26 chief administrators in the state's teacher education programs completed the questionnaire for an 65% response rate. A total of 144 of 230 receiving the survey responded for an overall return rate of 63%.

Materials

A survey containing seven multiple part questions was sent to each of the participants in the study. Questions on the survey were designed to elicit information regarding the impact of increased field placements on programs involved in the preparation of teachers. Specific survey questions focused on the broader issues of 1) how increased placements would affect teacher education programs and host schools; 2) how increased placements would affect relations between school districts and teacher education programs; 3) responsibility for costs associated with increased placements. A dichotomous choice response format with space for alternative responses was used. The purpose for this format was to encourage respondents to take a position; either one presented on the survey or to explain an alternative position.

Results

The first series of questions on the survey focused on the potential positive and negative effects of increased field placements on educational programs in K-12 schools and teacher education programs. Question one was addressed only to administrators of teacher education programs. The question asked administrators if increased student placements would place a burden on their teacher education programs. Forty-eight percent of the administrators responding indicated that it would

be a burden; 24% indicated that it would not while 29% chose not to comment on the question. The second part of question one asked administrators at all levels if increased field placements would place a burden on K-12 schools in the areas. Elementary school principals were least concerned that field placements will be a burden with only 15% reporting that it would be a burden. There is increasing concern at the middle level and high school principal levels with 22% and 43% respectively anticipating an increased burden on local schools. Teacher education program administrators appear to be most concerned with 58% reporting that increasing field placements will be a burden on the local schools.

The next series of questions dealt with the potential positive and negative effects of increased field placements on the relationship between local schools and teacher education programs. Specifically, administrators from all levels were asked if increased field placements would 1) enhance or strain relationships between teacher education programs and local school; 2) leave teachers feeling resentful or used; 3) leave teachers more or less willing to allow field placement students in their classrooms.

Table 1 summarizes results from these questions.

-Insert Table Here

Table 1

Perceived Effects of Increased Placements on Relations Between Local Schools and Teacher Education Programs

Group	Effects on teacher education program/local school relations					
	Enhance		Strain		Alternate or No Response	
	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n
Elementary Principals	(78)	66	(14)	12	(9)	8
Middle Level Principals	(74)	20	(15)	4	(11)	3
High School Principals	(64)	9	(36)	5	(0)	0
Ed. Deans & Chairs	(35)	6	(47)	8	(18)	3

	Teachers will feel used					
	Yes		No		Alternate or No Response	
	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n
Elementary Principals	(21)	18	(70)	60	(9)	8
Middle Level Principals	(22)	6	(70)	19	(7)	2
High School Principals	(36)	5	(64)	9	(0)	0
Ed. Deans & Chairs	(47)	8	(35)	6	(18)	3

	Will classroom teachers be more less willing to allow teacher education students in their classrooms?							
	More		Less		Same		Alt. or No Response	
	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n
Elementary Principals	(19)	16	(11)	9	(64)	55	(7)	6
Middle Level Principals	(15)	4	(11)	3	(52)	14	(22)	6
High School Principals	(35)	5	(29)	4	(29)	4	(7)	1
Ed. Deans & Chairs	(0)	0	(35)	6	(47)	8	(18)	3

Responses to the three questions dealing with relationships between K-12 schools mirror the responses to Question 1. As can be seen on Table 1, the majority of the elementary level principals surveyed do not anticipate negative effects such as having teachers feeling used or being less willing to have teacher education students in their classrooms. In fact, they anticipate increased field placements will enhance relations between their schools and teacher education programs. Middle level and high school principals surveyed reflect the same pattern as elementary level principals but with less unanimity. Elementary and middle level principals in the alternate or no response category for these questions suggested relations would benefit or deteriorate depending upon factors including 1) the amount of time required of teachers; 2) the quality of students being placed; 3) the degree of teacher input into the structure of the program.

In contrast to the way principals responded, a substantial number of the deans and chairs anticipated a negative effect on the relations between their programs and the school districts hosting their students. The largest percentage of the deans and chairs responding thought relations would be strained and teachers would feel used but would continue to accept field placements. The three deans and chairs in the alternate response category of Table 1 explained on their questionnaires that they were uncertain about the effect of additional placements. Two of the three commented that additional placements would definitely have a negative effect if teachers and the host schools were not full partners in structuring the new programs.

The third set of questions addressed responsibility for costs associated with increased field placements. Here between 82% and 85% of the administrators across all categories thought there was a need for greater incentives for teachers if

placements increased. When asked what types of incentives they would suggest for participating teachers, 48% of those surveyed suggested monetary remuneration while 27% and 26% respectively suggested educational credit and tuition remission as incentives. A small percentage of those surveyed suggested compensation time, activity passes, and special recognition would be appropriate as well.

Discussion

There is widespread and growing support for the expansion of field-based experiences in the preparation of teachers. What has not been addressed through systematic inquiry is the potential impact of large numbers of teachers in training on the monetary and human resources of teacher education programs and K-12 schools. Results of this study suggest that elementary level principals in particular see potential usefulness for additional teachers-in-training in their buildings; middle level and high schools also appear to see value but with greater reservation. These results may reflect the common concern for additional support staff in elementary school classrooms and less demands for additional support staff as students approach secondary level education. This represents speculation by the authors based upon the responses of principals to this survey. Indeed, it is clear that further research on expanding programs with collection of data through collaborative/action research is needed to identify how increased placements differentially affect teachers and principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Survey results from chief administrators in teacher education programs in this state clearly indicate significant concern for expanded placement programs. Deans and chairs for the most part think additional field placements will be a burden on the human resources within their own programs and those of the host schools. The concerns of deans and chairs is

particularly troublesome given that they represent the group most intimately aware of the resources necessary to operate field-based experiences. In addition, administrators at all levels indicated more monetary or other types of university or college resources will have to be added to if increased placements are to work effectively. In a period of tight fiscal constraint toward higher education, the specter of adding additional human and monetary resources looms as a real problem for administrators. Given interest by host schools and the perceived need by the teaching profession to increase the field-based component of teacher education, the challenge appears to be to find resources and mutually beneficial ways to implement field placement programs. Respondents in this study provided some suggestion in the form of tuition remission and educational credit for involvement in field-based programs. However, the ideas suggested by respondents in this study were fairly stereotypic incentives currently being used. The absence of strong monetary support coupled with increasing demand for more field-based programming, a higher degree and more intentional approach to collaboration between school districts and colleges/universities in identifying needs and particular way of structuring field placement programs that are mutually beneficial to the unique partners in the relationship may be essential. In the long run, a creative look at the needs and resources of the partners in the relationship may provide programs that better serve all those affected by the educational process.

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